

Why Change Doesn't Happen and How to Make Sure It Does

Only when the organizational structure and the staff are aligned with the school vision can productive and exciting change happen for children.

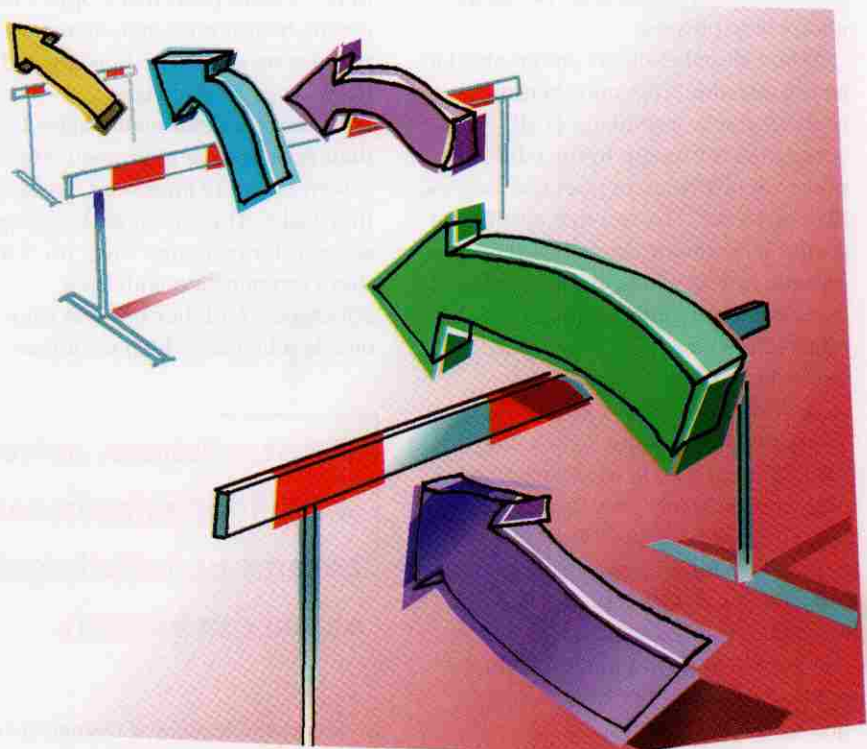
Leadership and productive change begin with the creation of a compelling organizational purpose. Today, nearly all school systems have the key elements of such a purpose: a set of beliefs, core organizational values, a mission statement, and a set of student learning goals.

But a compelling purpose alone will not result in *productive change*—change that makes a positive difference in student learning and in how schools operate.

What's missing in most cases is a concrete, detailed vision statement that describes what the organization will look like when operating at its ideal best to accomplish its declared purpose, as well as a systematic process we call *strategic alignment*. Strategic alignment occurs when the structure, policies, procedures, and practices of the organization totally support the organization's vision.

Five Reasons and Five Rules

In our work with hundreds of schools conducting strategic design efforts during the past decade, we have observed five interdependent reasons why productive change doesn't happen. If your district has gone through a strategic planning process, but little has changed for students, we recommend that you study these reasons and their associated change rules. Productive change happens when all five rules are observed.



■ **Reason 1: Your purpose isn't compelling enough.** To be a "good" compelling purpose, your system's statements of values, mission, outcomes, and vision must be clear, concise, discriminating, and inspirational. They must direct attitudes, thinking, paradigms, and actions. They must discriminate between what is okay to do and what is not okay.

If your staff can't state your compelling purpose in their own words from memory and with enthusiasm, you don't have one. It's that simple. If you must go to your file or look at the document behind glass in the school lobby to state your district's compelling purpose, you can bet it is not influencing your day-to-day and minute-to-minute teaching or leading decisions.

Change Rule 1: People don't change unless they share a compelling reason to change.

■ **Reason 2: You didn't develop it right.** Ken Murphy, superintendent of the Yarmouth, Maine, School Department and his board of education involved more than 2,000 people in their strategic planning process. That's an impressive accomplishment, because Yarmouth is a

relatively small school system with fewer than 1,800 students. Because they were involved, people knew what their plan contained. Today, community members quote the strategic plan when addressing the board. They know that what they are asking for will be considered if they can relate it to Yarmouth's compelling purpose.

When all stakeholders are involved in an organization's direction-setting process, the best thinking of all concerned is brought to the table. The power of involvement goes well beyond that, however. The fact that all affected parties in Yarmouth were involved also ensured districtwide communication, a committed staff and community, targeted resource allocations, and consistent follow-through.

How did educational leaders in Yarmouth significantly involve more than 2,000 people in the strategic planning process? First, they formed a task force of approximately 60 people who committed themselves to learning about our strategic design process. The task force then formed small teams whose charge was to go out into the community and ask specific strategic design questions.

Next, the board of education and task force members solicited input from school and community groups. On one occasion, task force members solicited community input during a live TV call-in program formatted something like a public television fundraiser. Unless you were living in a hole, you knew that Yarmouth was doing strategic planning, and that you would have a significant opportunity to express your opinion.

Finally, after hearing from the community, members of the task force met for two days to synthesize the information and create the district's strategic plan. The board of education approved the plan, and it has been in use ever since. Yarmouth paid the price to do it right, and they got it right.

Change Rule 2: People don't change unless they have ownership in the change.

■ *Reason 3: You didn't start using it*

immediately. Values, missions, outcomes, and visions have the shelf life of a ripe banana: They must immediately become part of all significant decisions and actions, or you can forget it. Schools throughout the country are filled with dusty, detailed accreditation process improvement plans that stopped influencing behavior the minute the accreditation team exited the building and headed for the interstate.

Effective transformational leaders use their new and exciting vision as the screen for every important decision they make. They use it as they prepare agendas for meetings. They use it as they communicate with their colleagues. And they use it as they decide who gets which resources.

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Successful leaders of change also know how important it is to be effective role models. Before compelling, purpose-based decision making can become part of a district's culture, staff members must see that their leaders are serious about the organization's new vision. Staff members need to know that their leader values the new vision, will stand for it, and will take risks to support it.

Change Rule 3: People don't change unless their leaders model that they are serious about the change.

■ *Reason 4: You didn't align the people.* For some reason, many educators act as though implementing the district's compelling purpose and strategic plan is an option. Many school districts—even those that have done a good job of strategic planning—seem to have trouble getting everyone to realize that, "Hey, this means you!" Businesses don't seem to have that problem. When

a business decides to make a significant change, it is expected that—come Monday morning—everyone will be moving in the same direction. But educational visions are usually more abstract than those of businesses; principals, directors, and teachers aren't quite sure what, if anything, is required of them personally.

The alignment of the organizational vision with the actions of those who are part of the organization is a critical step in creating real and lasting change. Such alignment is best fostered and assured through the supervision process. Every supervisor in the district—from the superintendent to the teacher—is a linking pin. Every individual links one part of the organization to another.

If the vision is lost by any pin, implementation of the vision becomes an option for anyone supervised by that pin, and in turn for anyone who reports to that pin's supervisees.

Director Paul Martindale and Superintendent Warren Hoshizaki of the Bruce County Board of Education, Chesley, Ontario, are implementing a supervision for alignment process that has every supervisor, at every supervision exchange, initiating dialogue that ensures that all staff members understand their role in implementing the vision. The dialogue requires that all staff members identify the things they are doing to implement the organizational vision, determine how they can use their present successes to create more success, create a vision for their school or classroom consistent with that of the system, and identify the resources and support they need to accomplish their vision (Oakley and Krug 1991).

Change Rule 4: People are unlikely to change unless they have a concrete picture of what the change will look like for them personally.

■ *Reason 5: You didn't align your organization.* If strategic direction is at the heart of leadership, then strategic alignment is the essence of management. New visions invariably demand new structures, policies, procedures, and practices. Organizational alignment is where the "heavy lifting" begins for leaders who are serious about creating change (Labovitz and Rosansky 1997).

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Organizations do a lot of things simply because they are organizations. For example, all schools select and develop staff members. They create curriculum, instructional delivery systems, and student assessment policies. They create relationships with parents, the community, the teachers, association. Now, all of these "things" that schools must do simply because they are schools can be consistent, unrelated, or inconsistent with the new vision. It seems obvious that if we want the vision to become a reality, we must align all structures, policies, and procedures with that vision.

For example, if your system has a stated belief that "all students can learn but not on the same day and in the same way" (Spady 1994), yet you continue to hire teachers who lecture and bow to the bell curve, you have not aligned your selection practices with your values and vision. The chances of accomplishing your vision are slim.

If you are to be successful, you must analyze each organizational structure, policy, procedure, and practice for its support of the new vision, and then change what is not accurately aligned. A lot of work? For sure. But if your system has created an exciting student-centered vision that incorporates all we

know about students and learning and all we know about the future world conditions our graduates will face, it's worth it. It's a must—it's time for the heavy lifting (Schwahn 1994).

South Washington County Schools in Cottage Grove, Minnesota, serves as a good example of an organization that is intentional and systematic about creating alignment. South Washington created a *compelling* organizational purpose: to empower all students—not just the most able—and to prepare students for life-role success. Their

beliefs and values, mission statement, and student exit outcomes were generated after a thorough study of shifts, trends, and future conditions. They are clearly focused on what students will encounter after they leave school. And South Washington educators did their planning the right way. They involved all stakeholder groups, and they took the time to engage everyone in thoughtful dialogue throughout the strategic planning process.

Superintendent Dan Hoke and his administrative team then identified 20 policies, procedures, and structures to align with their new vision. All principals met monthly to analyze the district's status regarding each of the 20 alignment needs; create minivisions for each structure, procedure, or policy that needed realignment; plan for what needed to be done; and identify the district administrator's and principal's roles in making the changes.

South Washington County has been most successful in aligning its empowerment initiative, site-based decision making, school improvement plans, and staff development activities with its compelling purpose. When visions change, structures need to change. You can bet on it.

Change Rule 5: People can't make a change—or make it last—unless they receive organizational support for the change.

Different, Not More, Work

It's important to realize that when you change your vision significantly, you don't necessarily increase your workload significantly. You were doing all these things anyway. Now you simply need to do them differently. You need to do them with your vision in mind. Knowing that it's different work, and not doubling your work, should make it easier to enlist people in the alignment process.

Strategic design—creating a compelling purpose and an inspirational vision—is where leadership begins. Strategic alignment—aligning the organizational structure and the people who work within that structure—is where the heavy lifting of management takes over. Planning, compelling purposes, and inspiring visions mean nothing until something different and better happens for children. Educational leaders would do well to build strategic alignment into their strategic plans from the beginning. ■

References

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